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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

10 JUL 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: (See Distribution List)

FROM:

Director of Global Issues

SUBJECT:

Options for Controlling Access
to Terrorist Weapons

1. The attached memorandum, prepared by our foremost expert on terrorist acquisition of weapons, provides a comprehensive look at how terrorists get weapons and offers some suggestions on impeding this access. These suggestions offer no easy solutions and are offered in hopes of stimulating further thought on the problem while pointing to the very real difficulties that lie in implementing each of them.

2. Your comments and suggestions are welcome and may be addressed to Chief, International Security Issues Division,

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Options for Controlling Access to Terrorist Weapons

GI M 85-10184CX, July 1985,

SUBJECT: Options for Controlling Access to Terrorist Weapons

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OGI/ISID/NP (10 July 1985)

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

8 July 1985

Options for Controlling Access to Terrorist Weapons

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Summary

Terrorists obtain most of their weapons through one of four channels, each of which presents a different set of problems and opportunities for control:

- o Patron state supporters, including Libya, Iran, and Syria are the most productive source of weapons from Bloc and Western sources for many terrorist groups. The best opportunity to limit the value of this channel lies in convincing Western government and arms manufacturers not to sell small arms and infantry weapons to identified patron states of terrorist groups.
- o The international gray arms market consists of a loose network of dealers and brokers who provide weapons through numerous cutouts and intermediaries. Aggressive targeting of these private dealers--whom no government is likely to make overt moves to protect--offers some opportunity for success.
- o Other terrorist groups are major sources of weapons for some terrorist organizations; weapons are frequently exchanged for logistic and operational support. Increasing the effectiveness of foreign customs and border control officials through training and technical support offers the major hope of cutting into this source of weapons.

This memorandum was prepared by [] Arms Transfers
Branch, Office of Global Issues. Comments may be directed to
[] Chief, International Security Issues Division, on
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- o **Theft and commercial sales are the major sources of weapons for terrorists in most places outside the Middle East. Improving and speeding-up US access to information on US-origin weapons discovered abroad in terrorist hands could help identify those declared end-users that do a poor job of ensuring reasonable security for the US weapons they import.** [REDACTED]

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Such efforts to control terrorist access to weapons, even if only partly successful, may nevertheless be worth considering, if only to limit terrorist access to new weapons and ammunition now becoming available. These include more effective, special-purpose ammunition, and weapons composed largely of non-metallic materials which could more easily foil conventional security systems. [REDACTED]

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Options for Controlling Access to Terrorist Weapons [REDACTED]

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Terrorists have a variety of channels through which to acquire weapons. This memorandum reviews the four principal sources of weapons for international terrorists and provides estimates of what might be done to impede arms transfers to these groups. [REDACTED]

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Our research indicates that terrorists have four principal sources of weapons:

- o Patron-state supporters.
- o The international gray arms market.
- o Support from other terrorist groups.
- o Theft and commercial purchase. [REDACTED]

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Patron State Support

Several governments, notably Libya, Iran, and Syria purchase prodigious quantities of ordnance--both Bloc and Western--some of which is passed to terrorists. Weapons made available to terrorists by patron states range from small arms to more sophisticated ordnance such as artillery rockets, and man-portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons. [REDACTED]

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Absent the ability to oblige the Soviets and Bloc countries to restrict arms sales to nations which support international terrorism, the best opportunity to prevent terrorists from acquiring arms via this channel is to convince Western governments and arms manufacturers not to sell weapons suitable for terrorist use--particularly small arms and other infantry weapons--to identified patron states of terrorist groups. This would require convincing not only major West European countries such as Belgium, Austria, and Italy, but also a growing number of Third World governments, including Brazil, Argentina, and Singapore, which are aggressively developing their indigenous arms industries, often under US or Western license. Most of these countries will resist pressure to ban sales of weapons to patron states. At a minimum they should establish more effective

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and verifiable end-user controls over exported ordnance. Their interest in US weapons technology for their own arms industries might offer some leverage in this area. [REDACTED]

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The International Gray Arms Market

Private arms dealers and brokers also purchase large quantities of weapons--from both Western and Bloc sources--for sale to a variety of clients, including terrorists. These weapons usually are acquired via a circuitous network of cutouts, which makes it impossible to trace complete purchase-to-delivery cycles. For this reason, Bloc nations--particularly Bulgaria--frequently use private arms dealers to both buy and sell weapons which may be destined for terrorist groups.

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Because gray market intermediaries are used by both Western and Bloc suppliers to distance themselves from the ultimate recipients of the arms they sell, we believe that aggressive targeting of these private dealers offers the most effective way of reducing the availability of weapons to terrorist groups. No government--either in the West or in the Bloc--is likely to make any overt move to protect an individual whose activities are, at best, marginally legal. Possible operations against such individuals should involve:

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Other Terrorist Groups

Our analysis of captured terrorist ordnance indicates that terrorist groups frequently provide arms and explosives to each other--probably in return for logistic and operational support. The contents of Red Brigade (BR) arms caches discovered in 1982 and the confessions of "penitent" terrorists suggest that in 1979 the BR received weapons from the PFLP with the understanding that the Brigade would keep most of the weapons and bury the rest for future Palestinian use. The BR, in turn, appears to have passed on some of these weapons to other West European terrorist groups.

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Given the increasingly compartmented nature of terrorist groups, there appears to be little that the US Government can do to prevent these groups from exchanging ordnance once acquired. The best hope for limiting this procurement channel probably lies in increasing the level of training of foreign customs and border control officials in an effort to complicate the spread of weapons from one terrorist group to another.

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Theft and Commercial Sales

Outside the Middle East, a large proportion of weapons found in terrorist arms caches appear to be non-military, civilian firearms which were either stolen or purchased from legitimate commercial concerns. Recent analyses of three caches of illicit arms discovered in Colombia revealed, for example, that over half of the recovered weapons were commercially available "paramilitary" weapons that had been purchased in South Florida gun shops. Similarly, analysis of West European terrorist weapons indicates that although the more lethal ordnance (such as automatic weapons and anti-tank launchers) is often of Bloc origin, most of the recovered firearms are locally available, commercial models of Western manufacture.

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Because control of civilian firearms is largely a local police problem, there is relatively little the US can do directly to reduce the number of weapons stolen or bought from foreign guns shops. Improving communications links to US officials (especially the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms at Treasury) so that they can learn quickly when commercial US-

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origin firearms turn up in terrorist hands is one important step. ATF could, in turn, check the declared end-user of these weapons in order to identify foreign gun shops and countries that do poor jobs of ensuring reasonable security for the US weapons they import. [REDACTED]

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New Dangers

Unless effective steps are taken soon to reduce the access of terrorists to new weapons, terrorist arsenals will not only grow, but also gain increasingly sophisticated and lethal arms. Recent advances in firearms technology have resulted in:

- o New types of ammunition--such as the French-made THV round--which combine the previously irreconcilable properties of causing massive tissue damage and penetrating soft body armor or a hardened vehicle.
- o Caseless ammunition--such as that developed for the new West German G-11 assault rifle--which does not contain metal cartridge cases that would trip metal detectors.
- o New small arms--such as the Austrian AUG assault rifle and the Glock pistol--which are largely constructed of high impact plastic and contain few metal parts, and are thus easier to smuggle through airport security systems.
- o Increasingly sophisticated night-vision and laser sighting devices that enable a shooter to reliably engage his victim in low light conditions and which facilitate rapid, accurate target acquisition. [REDACTED]

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